

News from Congresswoman Grace Meng 6th District Queens, New York

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MENG HONORED BY COMMISSION FOR THE PRESERVATION OF AMERICA'S HERITAGE ABROAD FOR SPONSORING NEW LAW TO MAKE DESECRATION OF CEMETERIES A VIOLATION OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Congresswoman saluted for protection the law will provide to Jewish cemeteries

The United States Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad honored U.S. Rep. Grace Meng (D-NY) for sponsoring the Protect Cemeteries Act, the new law that makes the desecration of cemeteries a violation of religious freedom.

The Commission awarded Meng with its Cultural Heritage Preservation Award for introducing the bill, which will help the agency in its work to protect and preserve cemeteries, monuments, and historic buildings that are associated with the heritage of U.S. citizens in Central and Eastern Europe.

Many of these areas include sites that fell behind the Communist Iron Curtain after the Jewish communities were destroyed through the Holocaust. In these places, Jewish burial grounds were left uncared for and unprotected. Political instability and anti-Semitism in the region remain a threat to the graves.

"Receiving this award is a tremendous honor and I thank the Commission for recognizing my efforts on this critical issue," said Meng. "This new law will have a huge impact on protecting cemeteries around the world, and I know the Commission will continue to do an exceptional job in preserving them."

"The Meng Act greatly strengthens the Commission's ability on behalf of the U.S. Government to protect cemeteries in Central and Eastern Europe associated with the heritage of Americans," said Commission Chair Lesley Weiss. "This legislation will preserve not only Jewish cemeteries, which have suffered from desecration and neglect, but also sacred sites of every American who traces their heritage to the region."

Meng introduced the Protect Cemeteries Act this past February. It quickly passed the House and the Senate, and was signed into law last month by President Obama.

The Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad, an independent agency of the U.S. Government based in Washington, D.C., was established in the late

1980's and works to identify, report on, and ensure the protection and preservation of cemeteries, monuments and buildings associated with the heritage of Americans in Eastern and Central Europe.

Some of the past recipients of the Cultural Heritage Preservation Award include: Stuart Eizenstat, Special Adviser to the Secretary of State on Holocaust Issues and former Deputy Secretary of Treasury, Under Secretary of State, and Ambassador to the European Union; Deputy Assistant Secretary of State in the Bush Administration Heather Conley; American Jewish Committee International Jewish Affairs Director Andrew Baker; B'nai B'rith International Executive Vice President Daniel Mariaschin; former German Ambassador Wolfgang Ischinger who negotiated the U.S.-German agreement on preservation of certain cultural properties; Stephen Jacobs, the architect of the Commission's Buchenwald and Tirana, Albania Holocaust Memorials; and former Prime Minister of Albania Sali Berisha, who established Holocaust Remembrance Day in predominantly Muslim Albania.

Attached photo: Congresswoman Grace Meng being presented with the Cultural Heritage Preservation Award by Lesley Weiss (r), Chairwoman of the U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad. Also pictured is Commission Member Lee Seeman (l), who also serves as a Councilwoman from the Town of North Hempstead on Long Island.

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